

[Tom Massey]

1

Range-lore

Nellie B. Cox

San Angelo, Texas. Interview

Page one Tales-Personal Anecdote

RANGE-LORE

"My father and family came from Mississippi to Dallas when I was one year old," says Tom Massey. "There was a very small settlement around one store. I've heard my parents tell of their hardships in traveling by wagon train. I can remember that in those years we didn't have a great variety to eat but we were happier than people are now and we didn't ask "Mr. Government" for no help either. C.12 - 2/11/41 - Texas

"In 1873 we moved to [Lampasas?] County. That trip was a great experience. My father had several hundred head of horses and driving them and moving the family was a big job. Hunters used to come in from the west 2 of us with great wagon loads of buffalo meat and we dried the meat, enough for a winter supply.

"My father's people came to the Concho Country in 1884 but I didn't come until the next year. I worked first on the Americk Ranch on Little Lipan Creek. This was the prettiest country that anyone ever saw. Grass was knee high. [e?] could put down a saddle blanket to sleep on at night and the grass was so thick that it seemed like we were on a mattress. Lipan [Flat?] at one time was covered with great mesquite trees, but a prairie fire swept

Library of Congress

over it one August when the moon was right and killed the trees. The old stumps were there when the farms were put in.

[?]There wasn't a fence in the whole country. Cowboys rode all the time to keep stock from drifting too far. Our horses would go as far as Brady Creek. Every March, ranch men would start out on their work of rounding up. [e?] would organize I suppose you'd say- decide who would be boss, wagon boss, and all the others that would be needed for good work. Sometimes as many as sixty men would start out. We'd work toward Paint Rock, then across toward Brady, through the Menardville and old Fort [McKavett?] Country. After we had covered the country, each fellow would take his own horses and go in home. In May we began the cattle work.

“Cowboys were the nerviest fellows that ever were 3 in the country. When they went to bring in a cow or horse, they stayed until they brought in what they were sent for. One Monday morning, old man Bright and his boy George, started out from their place near Mullin Crossing (on Veribest-Miles Road) together. Mr. Bright had heard of some of his cattle down in the Eden Country and George was going to the Loomis Ranch to work at a round-up. When George reached the Loomis Ranch they were not ready to start work but he had seen about twenty head of their I.C. horses and he thought he would throw them back toward the home ranch. While he was running the horses, his saddle horse stepped in a hole, fell and broke George's right leg in two places and knocked him unconscious. When he came to, his horse had run off with the loose bunch and George was left. He took off his boots and left them and his quirt on the ground. He took his knife, cut splints of mesquite sticks, tore up his undershirt and bound up his broken bones. The nearest human being was four miles away so he started out crawling to this house. The first night, a thunderstorm came up and the next morning George found that he had traveled in a circle and was just about one hundred yards from where his horse had fallen with him. He then crawled down into the bed of Lipan Creek, crawling along the creek until he came to Dry Lipan and followed it toward the dwelling of some people by the name of Frame. 4 As he crawled down the creek, he would pack mud on his broken leg, that kept down

Library of Congress

the inflammation. He lost his hat, his clothes were torn to shreds, and he was covered with blisters as big as a dollar. On Friday morning, a rider heard a dog from the Frame ranch barking down the creek and went to investigate and found George. It was a long time before he got well but he lived to be an old man. We found the boots and quirt where he said he had left them and his horse with the loose bunch, still with the saddle and bridle on.

"I lived in the rock house built by Ike Mullins who came to this country in 1868. The house used to have port holes for shooting at Indians. This old house is still in use. Below the Mullin place, R. F. Tankersley (father of Wash, Fayette, Mrs. Frary, Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Emerick), had built a rock house and dug a great ditch from the river in order to irrigate a small tract of land. Parts of the old ditch are still there.

"There were plenty antelope but buffaloes were scarce. One time I was looking for some horses. About night I came to Bird and Mertz's Ranch where I stayed all night. Mr. Mertz had just killed a buffalo and the meat was fine.

"In the fall of 1888, Ab Blocker brought four herds of cattle up here and wintered them around Lime-Kiln 5 Crossing. The next spring he trailed them to Kansas.

"One spring then we were working cattle, we had 3,000 head in one bunch. We got them bedded down but a big cloud was coming up so none of the fifteen men with the herd turned in for any sleep. The cattle were restless and with the first hard clap of thunder they were off. They ran all night and until nearly dark the next day. We boys rode with them through the dark and rain. We could see the lightning on their horns and on the tips of our horses' ears. We tried every way to get them milling, fired our six-shooter in front of them and beat them with our slickers. When they did begin to mill, the ones in the center were crushed to death.

"A lone robber held up two stage coaches at a stage stand between Ballinger and where the town of Miles is now. W. J. Ellis was driver of one stage but I don't know the name

Library of Congress

of the other driver. Each had seven passengers and each passenger handed over his money. Harry Bennett, a saloon keeper, was going somewhere to buy liquor. He had \$700.00 with him and when he saw what was happening he stuffed his money down his shirt collar. The robber gave each passenger 50¢ to buy dinner. A preacher on the stage only had 35¢ and his daughter who was with him didn't have any money but anyhow, 6 the robber gave each of them 50¢. 'Haven't you been in my congregation when I preached?' inquired the preacher of the robber. 'Well, if this is the effect your sermons have,' said Ellis, the driver, 'I don't think much of it.' The robber laughed but the preacher didn't like it much. The robber left on horseback. He rode to the north, stopped and put sacks on his horse's feet, rode east awhile, then changed directions again. They picked up his trail twice but in the thick grass, he was hard to follow. They arrested a fellow who used to work on a ranch down the river named Jim Brent (maybe I don't remember the name exactly) and sentenced him to twenty-five years in the pen. The only evidence that they had was that Jim had several large bills which amounted to a hundred dollars.

"Jim stayed in the pen about two years, then Mr. Ellis and a man at Ballinger got him a pardon. Years later a man in Chicago confessed to that robbery and other things of like nature.

"W. J. Ellis drove stages all over this country. He was never scared of anything and was equal to any emergency.

"This country has never been the same since it has been cut up into so many pastures and farms. We old fellows used to have lots of fun in our early days. Dances were our great pleasure. We'd ride for miles to attend one." Range-lore

Nellie B. Cox

San Angelo, Texas.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Library of Congress

Tom Massey, San Angelo, Texas, interviewed, January 24, 1938.